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News Release

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New Canadian union outraged by U.S. International union serving legal action in Florida District Court to attempt to stop Canadian members of OPEIU from forming separate union

International sends process servers and staff to break up COPE Canadian union members' meetings to deliver writs against Canadian Executive

Bal Harbour, Florida – A new Canadian union is outraged by its former U.S. parent union's attempt to stop Canadian members from separating by filing legal action today in Southern District of Florida Court and breaking up union meetings to serve writs against the Canadian executive.

The Canadian Office and Professional Employees' Union [COPE] was formed June 20 after 74% of the Canadian members of the Office & Professional Employees' International Union (OPEIU) signed forms authorizing Canadian autonomy, a right that is contained in the OPEIU constitution. It has been recognized by the Canadian Labour Congress.

But on Tuesday, International union representatives accompanied by court process servers arrived at the Florida hotel where COPE members were meeting and attempted to serve writs on the union, bursting into a COPE membership meeting without permission or notice. The OPEIU legal action seeks a court order that the Canadian union's separation from the U.S. union be declared null and void and seeks damages against the individual executive members of COPE.

"We are absolutely outraged by the actions of the U.S. union in attempting to stop Canadian members from exercising their democratic right to separate and form a Canadian union," said COPE president Jerri New. "For OPEIU to try and have a Florida Court tell Canadian workers in Canada that they cannot form their own Canadian union is beneath contempt and illustrates why our members have strongly decided to separate from OPEIU."

New said that the OPEIU legal action and disruption of the Canadian union's meeting are a desperate effort to intimidate Canadian workers and their elected representatives that will not succeed.

"Canadian workers in our union will never be told by an American union president what we can or cannot do in our own country," New said. "These heavy-handed tactics are a disgrace to the OPEIU and no doubt an embarrassment to the American labour movement."

COPE Secretary-Treasurer Serge Cadieux added that for Quebec union members it is beyond belief that an American union would show such disrespect for democracy.

"We have obtained the written support of more than 24,000 union members in Canada for our decision in just one month – does the OPEIU have no respect for the democratic decision of workers in Quebec and Canada?" Cadieux asked. The autonomy drive obtained the support of 74% of the union's 33,000

members, he said. In Québec, the new union is known as Syndicat canadien des employées et employés professionnels et de bureau (SEPB).

New said the OPEIU has already tried and failed to block the Canadian autonomy move in British Columbia Supreme Court earlier this month and that COPE will retain legal counsel in Florida to fight the OPEIU action here.

“We are confident that an American judge will see what a Canadian judge earlier decided – that the OPEIU’s case against Canadian autonomy has no merit,” New said. “All the OPEIU legal action in Florida will mean is an enormous waste of workers’ hard-earned dues, money that should be spent for the benefit of union members and in organizing workers.”

New, who is also president of BC-based COPE Local 378, said that COPE will consider its options in filing a counter-suit against OPEIU if necessary but would prefer to get on with the process of building the new Canadian union.

COPE Local 378, formerly OPEIU Local 378, represents about 11,000 members in British Columbia, including workers at ICBC, BC Hydro, Terasen, Accenture, Hastings Racecourse, TransLink and other employers. Employers elsewhere in Canada include the Mouvement Desjardins, Laurentian Bank of Canada and Gaz Métropolitain in Quebec; Saskatchewan’s SGI Insurance; in Ontario: Ticketmaster, the Ombudsman, the Community Care Access Centre; and credit unions, trade union offices and other public and private sector employers across Canada.